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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
August 13, 2017
10th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 3:5-12, Matthew 13:44-52

Hymns: 234; 366:1-5; 521:1-4; 413:5,6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 8:28-30

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: “All things work together for good”

The opening verse of our text has got to be one of the most frequently quoted verses of Scripture, right up there with John 3:16. Sometimes the whole verse isn't quoted, just the few words I repeated from our text. The passage suffers from being torn from its context. With that happening it becomes a challenge for the individual who is suffering affliction or persecution to see how any good could come out of the present difficult circumstances they are experiencing in their lives. With the Holy Spirit's guidance we

shall address those challenges by considering how it can be, indeed always is that --

THEME: All Things Work Together for Good.

We need to keep these words of assurance and faith in their context so that we might remember that –

I. God Graciously Works.

This work of God begins in our hearts. This important passage of Scripture begins with the assertion “**We know.**” That begs the question, “How do we know?” In the Greek there are different words expressing personal knowledge. One of them is the knowledge of experience. I know that a lit match can burn me. I know this because I have experienced it, and experienced it more than once. One might assume that we would be gratified to know that this was the Greek word found in our text. Indeed as life goes on for the child of God we do experience the faithfulness of our God. We do possess that knowledge of experience. But that is not what the Spirit led the Apostle Paul to write in our text, and that is good. Things happen in our lives that are beyond our past experience. Things may happen in our lives that are so extreme they might bring us to the brink of despair so that we would conclude that in our experience nothing, absolutely nothing good could come out of the current events we are facing. And we would be wrong, so very, very wrong.

The word for knowledge used here is a superior word to that other word. The Apostle Paul uses the Greek word for knowledge that comes from revelation. Now to human reason we might not think that is superior knowledge, but it is most certainly. This knowledge comes from the conviction that the Holy Spirit has graciously worked in our hearts that God works in our lives for good. Then no matter how difficult the circumstances, no matter how bleak we see the future to be, we have the certainty that these things are in God’s hands, and God our heavenly Father always has and always will work with these things for our good. We have God’s Word and promise on that!

“He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’⁶ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear.’”
(Hebrews 13:5,6)

And again the Lord says:

“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10).

And so we share the confidence of faith expressed by the Psalmist:

*“God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;”*
(Psalm 46:1-2)

We have a sure foundation that God cares for us in all our ways. No greater demonstration of His loving care can be noted than that very fact that He gave His only begotten Son to suffer and die for our sins, to secure for us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. He will not leave us or forsake us in any circumstance of life. No matter how severe the trouble or deep the grief our God and Savior abides with us in grace and works for our good.

The next question on one’s mind might be, “Does this include me?” For whom does God work for good? Does it include everyone in the world? And here we find a significant qualification.

II. God Works for those Called according to His Purpose.

According to His purpose? What does that mean? It is so important for us to understand exactly what that means, because it may not always coincide with what we are thinking of as our own purpose in life. We may have so many purposes or goals or ambitions, and not all of them are going to be for our good. We won’t want to admit that, but when one starts to think back upon some of the disappointments in life we might have to admit that we do need to “thank God for unanswered prayers,” as Garth Brooks once sang. Actually that is a bit misleading, for they aren’t unanswered

prayers as much as they are times when God in grace and wisdom said, “No,” or “Not yet,” to some of our earnest prayers.

God is not simply trying to please us in this life as a doting grandfather might do. He has a higher purpose than any of our earthly goals, and that purpose is our eternal salvation. So God began His good work in us and He will see it through to its end. That message expressed in detail in our text is what we also read in -- **Philippians 1:3,6** *“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*

So what all does God work in us as we make our way through this life? Putting it in one word, FAITH. And remember this, God’s will for your salvation began long before you were born. Listen to the wonder of God’s grace towards you as Paul expressed in our text:

Romans 8:29-30 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified;

The foreknowledge of God is not a matter of fate; it is a matter of grace. God knew you, you personally since before the world began. Since before the world began He desired you to be His own child and heir of salvation. That grace brought the determination that you were predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son. There are two amazing things to note here. It wasn’t by chance that you came to faith in the one true God; it wasn’t an accident of birth that you are a Christ believer rather than following the gods of this world. It was by the predeterminate foreknowledge and election of God. He determined that you should be saved.

To that end it was a matter of forming you, transforming you, making you something different than you were by nature. He took you, a child of wrath just like others, one who was dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), one who was “brought forth in iniquity” (Psalm 51:5), and through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit He made you to be like His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from

sinner (Hebrews 7:26). It was and is God's purpose that Jesus, the God Man, be one of many brethren. So it is that God called us to be part of the family of God, one of God's holy people. Holy is the tricky part, for we all know that we have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed many times over. Indeed we have confessed it many times over. God, in fulfilling His purpose for us, has justified us. He declared us righteous and holy before Him. This was accomplished through the atoning work of Jesus, "*who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.*" (Romans 4:25)

Paul continues with the blessed conclusion that flows from God's purpose and work in calling us to faith in His Son. "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*" (Romans 5:1,2) It is absolutely true that "*we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.*" (Romans 5:10) Jesus paid the price; He took our sins and sin's guilt and condemnation to the cross so that we are delivered from death. We are reconciled to God, we have peace, a peace that came into our possession by God graciously calling us to faith.

This is the big picture; the picture of your life and mine as God sees it. We must place this blessed assurance of verse 28, "**that all things work together for good**" in this picture frame. We don't naturally do that. We are more earthly minded. We are far more shortsighted than God is. Even with this detailed reminder of how God works, and how far back into eternity His plan for us has gone, we still struggle. We daren't lose sight of God's end goal in His purpose for our lives.

III. God Works for Our Eternal Glory.

Those last few words of our text are rich with hope and comfort.

Romans 8:30 "Whom He justified, these He also glorified."

This is the Lord's goal for you. For the Lord it is as good as done. Any and all of the difficulties that life brings our way will not stand in God's way of fulfilling that goal. He will work all things for

good, that good that you will be glorified. At times we will suffer trials and tribulations. In this life we will shed tears, and there will be death, and there will be sadness. However you may be assured of this, that *“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* (Romans 8:18) *“If indeed we suffer with Him, (it is to that purpose) that we may also be glorified together.”* (Romans 8:17).

This is our hope. This is our goal. Things happen in this life that are at the very least unpleasant. And we struggle with them, but they do serve for our good. Peter reminds us that even in tribulation we maintain the joy of our salvation. We read in Peter’s first epistle:

1 Peter 1:6-9 *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,⁸ whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,⁹ receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”*

Yes, all things do work for our good. Even the hard things and the sad things. They lead us to lift our eyes to heaven for that is where we will find our help. We lift our eyes to heaven because that is where we will find our final deliverance. We lift our eyes to heaven knowing that Jesus has prepared a place for us and there awaits the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls, and that glory that that shall be ours. God sees this as accomplished in Christ. And so in all things we live in that hope of glory knowing, being fully assured *“that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (v.28)

“Haste, my soul, from grace to glory,
Armed by faith and winged by prayer;
All but heav’n is transitory;
God’s own hand shall guide you there.
Soon shall end this earthly story,
Swift shall pass the pilgrim days,
Hope soon change to heav’nly glory,

Faith to sight, and prayer to praise.” (Christian Worship 465:4)

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)